Sneaky Fingering Secrets

BY DUCK BAKER

HAVING EVOLVED FROM 19th-century parlor music, American fingerstyle guitar has sprouted many stylistic branches, including country blues, old-time country, Hawaiian slack-key, Chet Atkins-style, and ragtime. Despite their differences, these musics share a common root. Players as diverse as Mississippi John Hurt, Blind Blake, Merle Travis, and Cyril Pahinui almost exclusively base their music on steady, alternating bass lines. It's striking that other great fingerstyle traditions—such as classical, flamenco, and bossa nova—make little, if any, use of this technique. Because of its reliance on alternating bass, American fingerstyle guitar demands a unique approach to fretting-hand fingering.

Division of labor. To play alternating bass lines, you need to commit certain fingers to sustaining bass notes, while leaving other fingers free to fret melody notes. This typically involves unorthodox fingerings.

Look at **Ex. 1**, which features a steady alternating bass and an active melody line within a *C* chord. In this pattern, your 3rd and 2nd fingers hold down the bass notes. The 2nd finger never moves, while the 3rd shifts between the fifth and sixth strings. This leaves your 1st and 4th fingers free to fret melody notes. The 4th finger works the 3rd and 4th frets, while the 1st finger handles notes on the 1st and 2nd frets.

Untying the knot. It's the 2nd fret that's crucial. To play *A* (on the *and* of beat one, bar 1), the natural tendency is to move your 2nd finger from the fourth to the third string, but you'll save yourself endless headaches if you simply sneak your 1st finger over to *A* instead. For years, I've watched good guitarists tie their fingers into knots because they move the 2nd finger back and forth. If you do this, the *E* bass note can't ring for its full quarter-note value.

A similar situation occurs in beat two, bar 2: While sustaining the *E* bass with your 2nd finger, use your 1st finger to fret both *G*♭ and *F* on the top string.

Ex. 2 shows how the division of labor is the same in a *G* chord. Again, your 2nd and 3rd fingers commit to the bass, while your 1st and 4th fingers play the melody. Here, the dance is even trickier, but once you master the moves, you'll be rewarded with ringing, independent bass and melody lines.

Picking tips. To play these examples up to speed, you'll need to pick them with your thumb, index, and middle fingers. Use your thumb to hit the bass notes, your middle finger to pluck the downbeat melody notes (these occur simultaneously with the bass notes), and your index finger for the upbeat melody notes.

Acclaimed fingerstyle guitarist Duck Baker has recorded 15 solo albums covering a spectrum of styles, including swing and free jazz, traditional Irish and Appalachian music, ragtime, blues, and gospel. He has several books and instructional videos on the art of fingerstyle, steel-string guitar.

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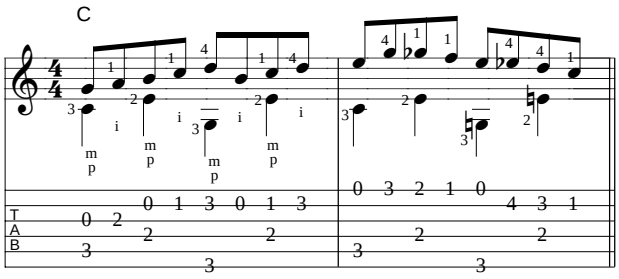
Ex. 1



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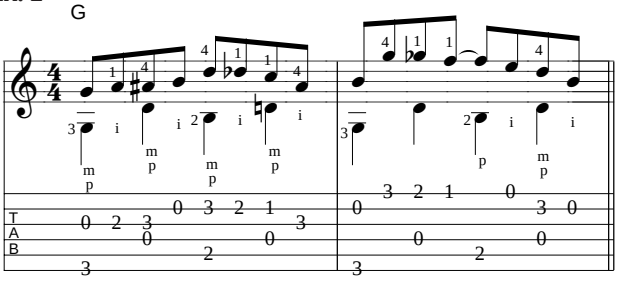
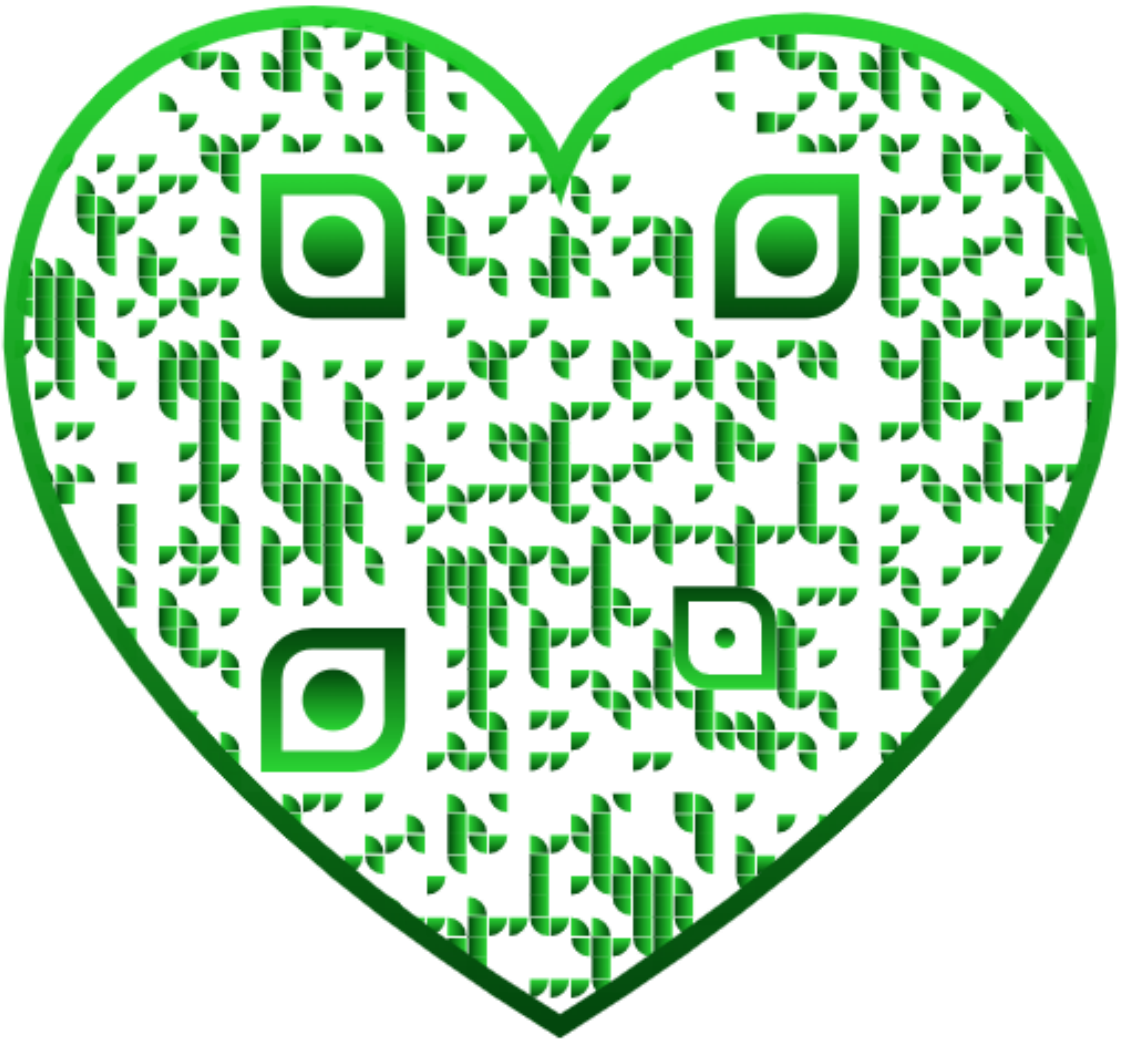


"Indian music gave me a greater sense of rhythm and syncopation."—George Harrison, Nov. '87 *GP*



BOOK BROWSING

12-BAR BLUES—THE COMPLETE GUIDE FOR GUITAR

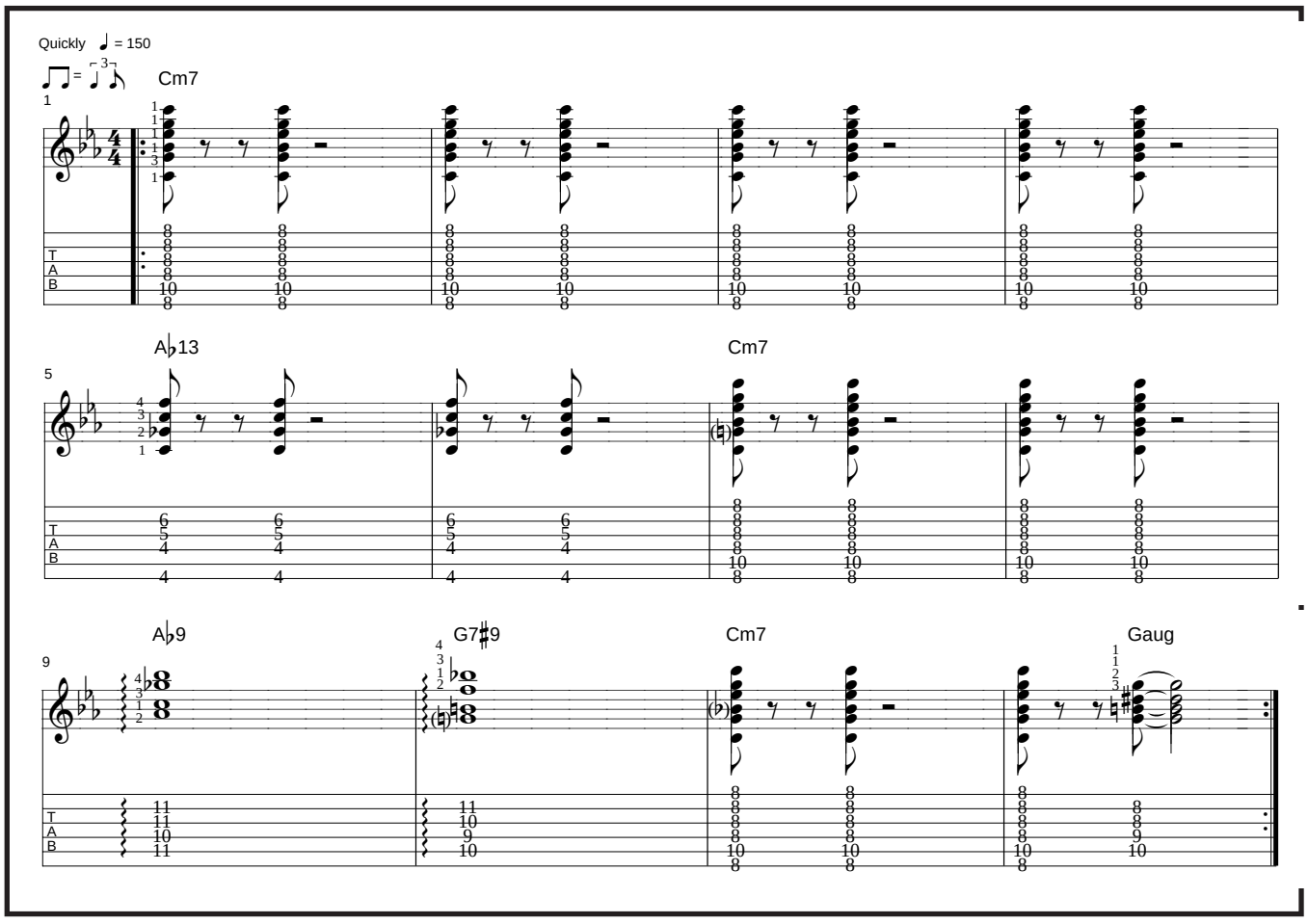
IF YOUR BLUES RHYTHM chops are lagging, and you need an infusion of cool voicings, grooves, and riffs, you'll dig Dave Rubin's *12-Bar Blues—The Complete Guide for Guitar*. This book-and-CD package [$14.95 from Hal Leonard] is all about blues accompaniment. Rubin includes the chords and riffs (written in tab and standard notation) for several variations of slow 12/8 blues, swing shuffles, boogie shuffles, Chicago riffs, minor blues, jazz blues, and bebop blues. To round out the package, he explains the secrets of tritone comping and offers a handful of hip intros and turnarounds. Backed by drum machine and bass, Rubin demos each example on the companion CD, so even if sight-reading isn't your strongest suit, you'll easily grasp the grooves by simply spinning the disc.

Excerpted from a section titled "Jazzy Minor Blues," the following example proves that you can work uptown sounds into a 12-bar context. "Soulful jazz," Rubin elaborates, "was popular in the late '60s. Two hits from the era—'Chitlins Con Carne' by Kenny Burrell and 'Coming Home Baby' by Herbie Mann—are based on progressions similar to this one."

Rubin goes on to explain why the *A♭13* (bars 5 and 6) substitutes for *Fm9*—the IVm—and how Albert King's "As the Years Go Passing By" contains the *A♭9-G7♯9* change (bars 9 and 10). Record several passes through this progression, and then try soloing over it using the *C* blues scale.

A thorough and fun exploration of blues rhythm guitar, Rubin's *12-Bar Blues* promises hours of playing enjoyment.

—ANDY ELLIS



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Spinning Clusters Into Lines

BY ERIK HALBIG

WE ALL HIT MUSICAL SLUMPS. ONE way to escape the creative doldrums is to look at a familiar subject from a new perspective. Take chord voicings, for instance. You've probably practiced diatonic triads—three-note chords built from major scale tones stacked in thirds. Let's look at another way to generate harmony from a major scale, and then explore licks derived from the resulting chords.

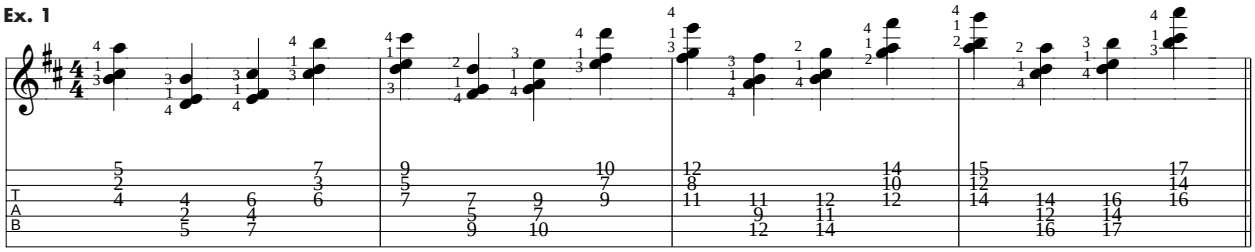
Clusters from intervals. Try **Ex. 1**—a series of chordal clusters in the key of *D*. In each case, the chord's bottom interval is a second and the top interval a fifth or sixth. This contrast of small and large intervals gives the voicings a very different sound from standard major, minor, augmented, and diminished triads.

Lines from clusters. In **Examples 2**, **3**, and **4**, we arpeggiate these voicings to produce melodic lines. Notice how the lines sound like they're composed of intervals, rather than from a series of scale tones. Refreshing!

Scale-based lines have predictable fingerings, which can lead you into pattern playing. To subvert this tendency, play these interval-drenched lines using different fretting-hand fingerings. Try to find at least two ways to work through each example. As notated, pick each note, then try to spice the lines up with occasional slides, hammer-ons, and pull-offs.

National Guitar Workshop instructor Erik Halbig has performed with Scott Henderson, Frank Gambale, and Will Ray. Halbig's *Power Pentatonics* and *Contemporary Country Guitar Improvisation* are published by Alfred/Workshop.

Ex. 1



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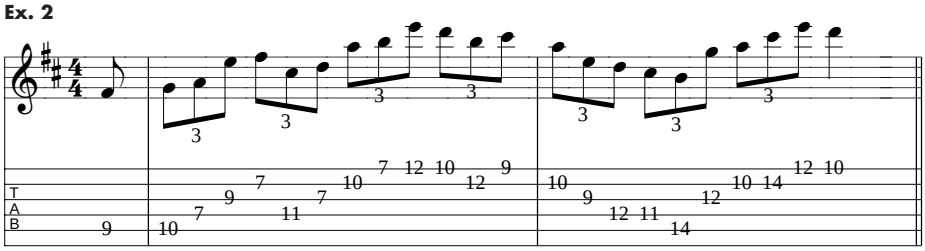

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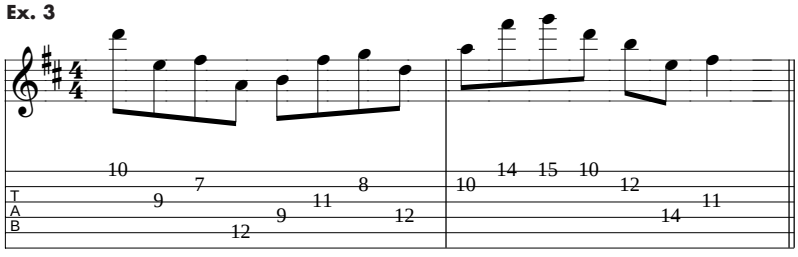

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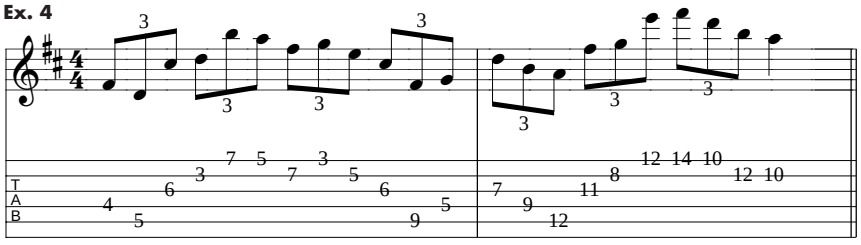

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"Telecasters play best when the strings are low. They buzz a bit and add to the funk."—Joe Walsh, Oct. '72 *GP*

Cesar Rosas on Tracking with Dylan

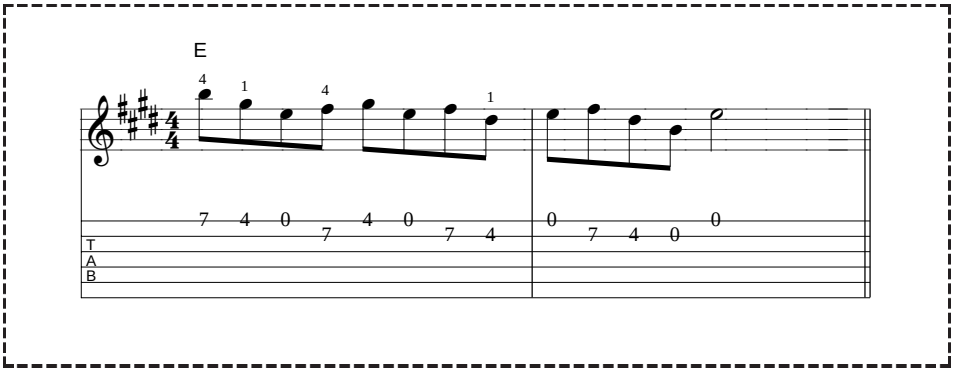
IN THE LATE '80S, BOB DYLAN invited Cesar Rosas, Los Lobos' lefty guitarist, into the recording studio to cut some tracks. "When I got to the studio," Rosas recalls, "he was working with some country guys on old hillbilly songs—stuff that was *so* cool. He's got a strange way of working, but I liked it. Basically, he had his guitar strapped on, a mic in front of him, and a bunch of lyrics. We all sat around in the studio with our headphones on, not knowing what the next song was going to be. Then he'd start jamming. Pretty soon, everybody would get a feel for the song, and the bass player would come in, then the drummer, then everyone else. We'd keep playing until it got really intense. After 15 or 20 minutes of nonstop playing, when everybody was warmed up to the song, he'd say, 'Start the machine.' If the first take came out good, he'd keep it. He likes to work off the first impression you get of the song, which is usually the best way."

Lick of the Month

MERGING TRIADS

RANDY FEIFER, A GUITAR teacher in the Washington, D.C., area who hails from Bethesda, Maryland, submitted this month's winning lick. "The phrase is cool," he writes, "because it combines two ideas—arpeggiated *E* and *B* triads—on the first and second strings. You can use this riff over an *E* chord."

Once you've played through the lick picking every note as written, make it as legato as possible using hammers and pulls. For fun, throw on some slapback echo—something between 50ms and 100ms.



Send us your candidate for Lick of the Month (preferably notated *and* on cassette), along with a brief explanation of why it's cool and how to play it. If we select your offering, you'll get a funky custom T-shirt that's available *only* to Lick of the Month club members. Mail your entry to Lick of the Month, *Guitar Player*, 411 Borel Ave. #100, San Mateo, CA 94402. Include your name, address, and phone number. Materials won't be returned, and please don't call the office to check the status of your submission. You'll get your shirt if your lick is chosen.

PHOTO: CLAYTON CALL

BACK TRACK

Mixolydian Magic

BY ANDY ELLIS

FOR THE PAST TWO ISSUES, WE'VE been exploring modes. October's "Modes in a Nutshell" offered an overview of how modes are constructed and how they relate to major scales, and November's "Dancing with Dorian" explained how Dorian works with minor-7th chords.

We've learned how modes are especially

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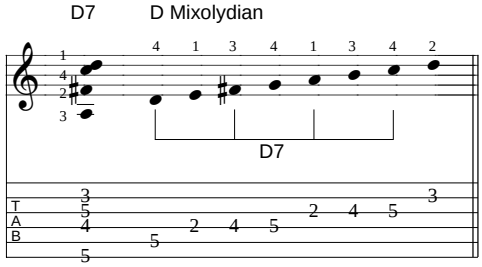

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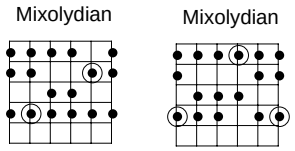

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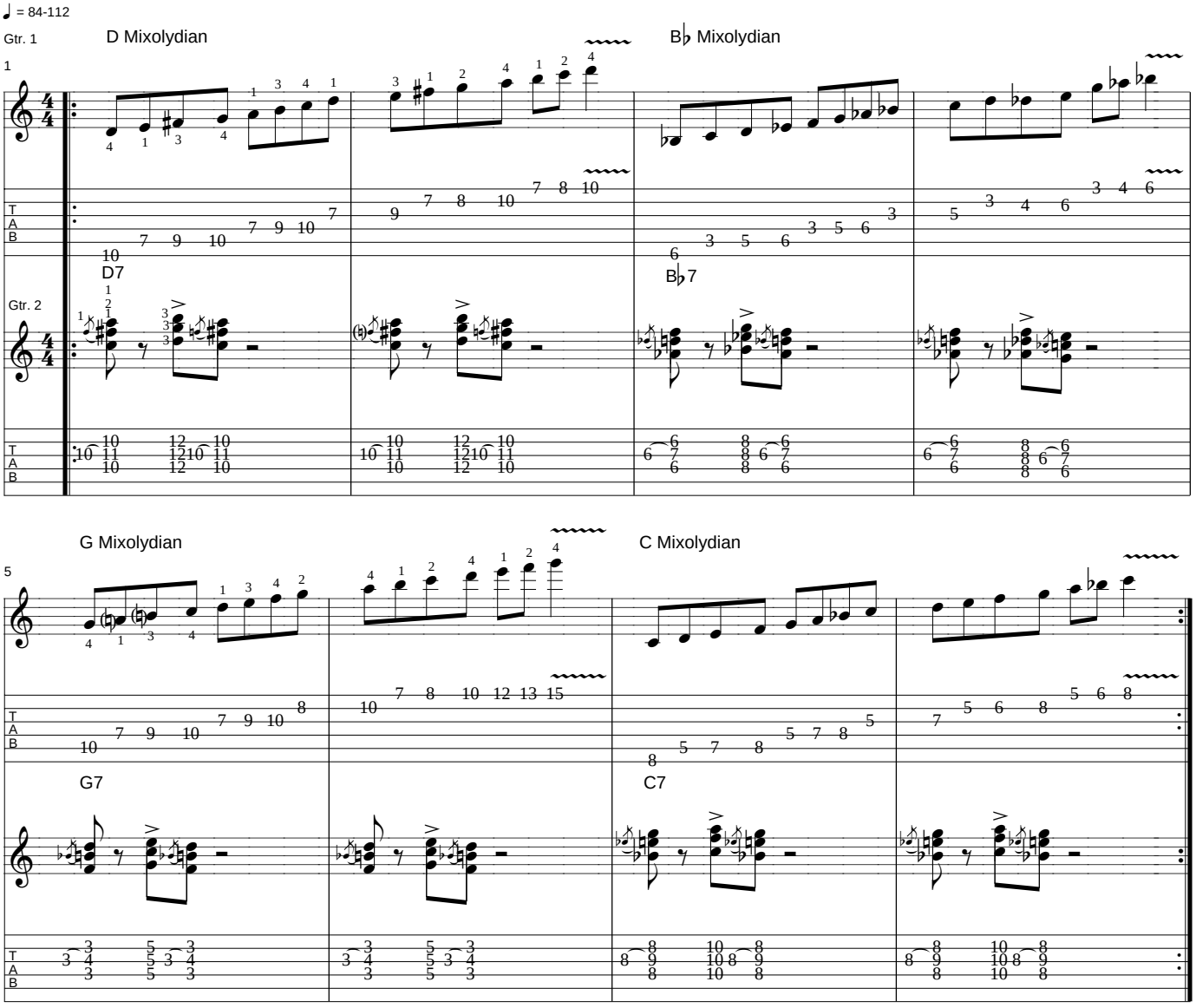

"In flamenco, everything is by intuition, by one's own taste, out of one's heart, by invention."—Sabicas, Aug. '71 *GP*

handy for improvising melodically over progressions with shifting tonal centers. The trick is to become familiar with each mode's unique character, and learn to associate it with a corresponding chord type.

Dominant flavors. This time out, we'll focus on the Mixolydian mode and its close relationship with dominant chords. Look at **Ex. 1**. First play the *D7* voicing to get its sound in your ears, and then play through the adjacent one-octave *D* Mixolydian pattern. Notice how *D7*'s chord tones—*D*, *F♯*, *A*, *C*—lie within *D* Mixolydian. These chord tones (1, 3, 5, ♭7) are separated by neighboring scale tones a whole-step or a half-step away. The concept is simple: A *D7* arpeggio resides inside *D* Mixolydian. This is true for any dominant-7th arpeggio and any Mixolydian mode that share the same root. For example, *A7* lies within *A* Mixolydian and *E7* lies within *E* Mixolydian.

Now ascend and descend through **Ex. 2**'s two Mixolydian patterns. (These forms are moveable, and their roots are circled.) For example, play the first pattern at the second position to get *D* Mixolydian, then strum *D7* to create a harmonic context. Next play the second pattern at the seventh position to once again generate *D* Mixolydian, and strum *D7*. To satisfy yourself that each *D* Mixolydian pattern contains *D7* chord tones, listen for them and then identify them on the fretboard.

Chord tones are only part of the story. The neighboring scale tones provide tension that the stable chord tones release. A well-constructed solo balances these two sounds.

There are dozens of useful Mixolydian patterns—in fact, you can easily convert any major scale to Mixolydian by simply lowering the major scale's 7 a half-step to ♭7. (For a complete listing of all seven mode formulas, see the Oct. '99 Back Track.)

Lift off. Let's try some Mixolydian magic. **Ex. 3** is a repeating eight-bar progression with shifting tonal centers. All four chords are dominant 7s, so you can play the corresponding Mixolydian mode over each R&B riff: *D* Mixolydian for *D7*, *B♭* Mixolydian for *B♭7*, *G* Mixolydian for *G7*, and *C* Mixolydian for *C7*.

Record at least 24 bars of this progression (Gtr. 2). Before improvising, play Gtr. 1 with its two-bar, two-octave ascending Mixolydian patterns.

Soaring. As we saw last month, stepping through a mode one note at a time isn't improvising. You need to find melodic pathways through the pattern before you're making music. Remember:

- Use interval jumps to generate interesting melodic contours. Skipping strings automatically creates wide intervals.
- Don't cram all the scale tones into each two-bar segment. Let your ears guide you to a few cool notes for each chord.
- Vary your rhythms—sustain some notes and rip through others.
- Include a few chromatic passing tones to connect one scale tone with another. Non-scale tones are dissonant and work best on upbeats.
- Use hammer-ons, pull-offs, slides, and bends to lend a vocal quality to your lines.

Coda. Once you can groove through Ex. 3, you're on your way to mastering Mixolydian. The next step is to work Mixolydian phrases into your songs and solos. Look for extended dominant-7th vamps, and when you find one, drop into Mixolydian instead of the blues scale. For inspiration, listen to classic Jerry Garcia improvs—he often visited the Mixolydian mode in Grateful Dead jams.

Tips Jar

"In the few lessons I took with Jim Hall, part of what he had me do was harmonize scales—first with triads, then with random intervals. So now, instead of thinking of a chord form, I'll have whatever scale is available and whatever intervallic combinations I like."

—BILL FRISELL, APRIL '85 *GP*

All of us—no matter how long we've played or how skilled we are—have gaps in our knowledge. Back Track is an ongoing Sessions series designed to fill these holes and inspire musical breakthroughs. Got a topic you'd like to see us address? Send your question to Back Track, c/o *Guitar Player*, 411 Borel Ave. #100, San Mateo, CA 94402, or e-mail it to guitplyr@mfi.com.

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